

FIGURE 4-7 (left) Houses of Lao people in northern Laos. The fronts of Lao houses, such as those in the village of Muang Nan, Laos, face one another across a path, and the backs face each other at the rear. Their ridgepoles (the centerline of the roof) are set perpendicular to the path but parallel to a stream if one is nearby. Inside adjacent houses, people sleep in the orientation shown, so neighbors are head-to-head or feet-to-feet. (right) Houses of Yuan and Shan peoples in northern Thailand. In the village of Ban Mae Sakud, Thailand, the houses are not set in a straight line because of a belief that evil spirits move in straight lines. Ridgepoles parallel the path, and the heads of all sleeping persons point eastward.

Despite their similarities, the houses in these four Chinese villages have individual designs. Houses have second-floor open-air patios in Kashgar, small open courtyards in Turpan, large private courtyards in Yinchuan, and sloped roofs in Dunhuang. McColl attributed the differences to local cultural preferences (Figure 4-8).

U.S. Folk House Forms

Older houses in the United States display local folk-culture traditions. When families migrated westward in the 1700s and 1800s, they cut trees to clear fields for planting and used the wood to build houses, barns, and fences. The style of pioneer homes reflected whatever upscale style was prevailing at the place on the East Coast from which they migrated. In contrast, houses built in the United States during the past half-century display popular culture influences.

Fred Kniffen identified three major hearths or nodes of folk house forms in the United States: New England, Middle Atlantic, and Lower Chesapeake. Migrants carried house types from New England northward to upper New England and westward across the southern Great Lakes region; from the Middle Atlantic westward across the Ohio Valley and southwestward along the Appalachian trails; and from the lower Chesapeake southward along the Atlantic Coast (Figure 4-9).

Four major house types were popular in New England at various times during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as shown in Figure 4-10. When settlers from New England migrated westward, they took their house type with them. The New England house type can be found throughout the Great

Lakes region as far west as Wisconsin, because this area was settled primarily by migrants from New England. As the house type preferred by New Englanders changed over time, the predominant form found on the landscape varies based on the date of initial settlement.

The major house type in the Middle Atlantic region was known as the "I"-house, typically two full stories in height with gables to the sides. The "I"-house resembled the letter "I"—it was only one room deep and at least two rooms wide. The "I"-house became the most extensive style of construction in much of the eastern half of the United States, especially in the Ohio Valley and Appalachia. Settlers built "I"-houses in much of the Midwest because most of them had migrated from the Middle Atlantic region.

The Lower Chesapeake or Tidewater style of house typically comprised one story, with a steep roof and chimneys at either end. These houses spread from the Chesapeake Bay-Tidewater Virginia area along the southeast coast. As was the case with the Middle Atlantic "I"-house, the form of housing that evolved along the southeast coast typically was only one room deep. In wet areas, houses in the coastal southeast were often raised on stilts or on a brick foundation.

Today, such distinctions are relatively difficult to observe in the United States. The style of housing does not display the same degree of regional distinctiveness because rapid communication and transportation systems provide people throughout the country with knowledge of alternative styles. Furthermore, most people do not build the houses in which they live. Instead, houses are usually mass produced by construction companies.

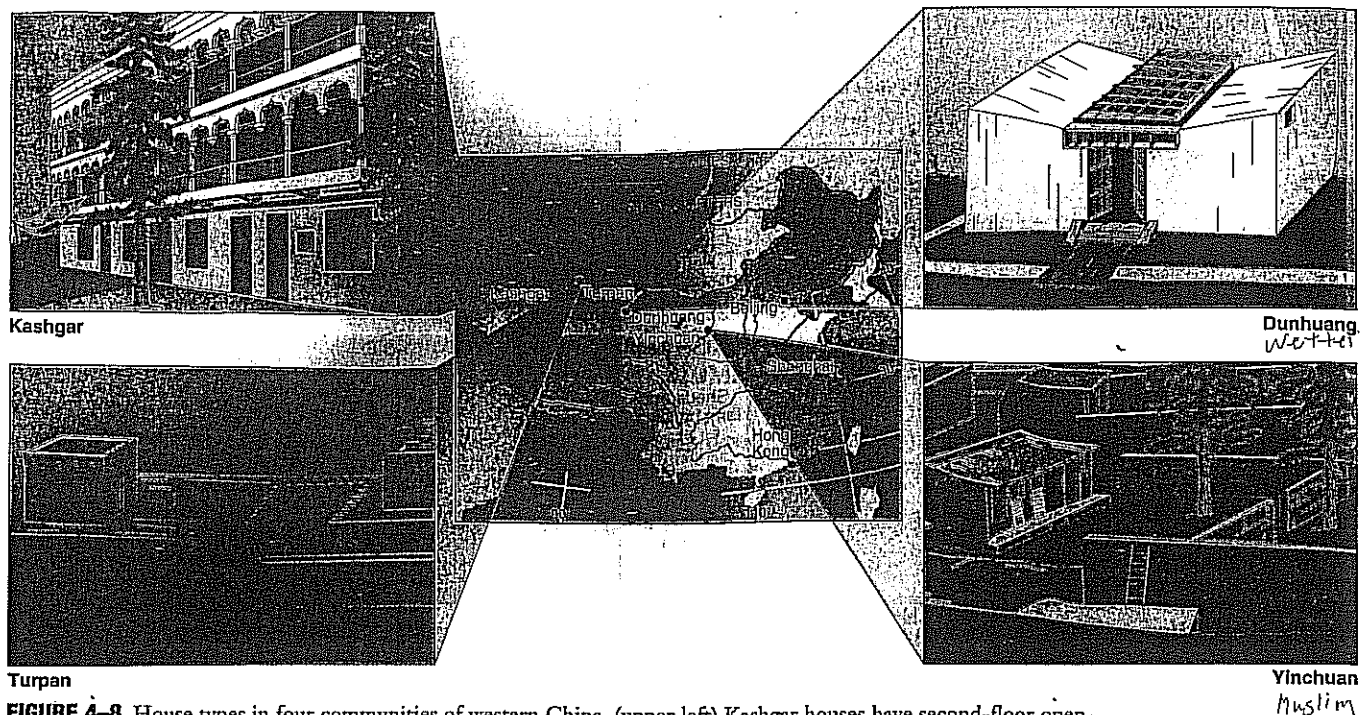


FIGURE 4-8 House types in four communities of western China. (upper left) Kashgar houses have second-floor open-air patios, where the residents can catch evening breezes. Poplar and fruit trees can be planted around the houses, because the village has a river that is constantly flowing rather than seasonal, as is the case in much of China's dry lands. These deciduous trees provide shade in the summer and openings for sunlight in the winter. (lower left) Turpan houses have small, open courtyards for social gatherings. Turpan is situated in a deep valley with relatively little open land, because much of the space is allocated to drying raisins. Second-story patios, which would use even less land, are avoided, because the village is subject to strong winds. (lower right) Yinchuan houses are built around large, open-air courtyards, which contain tall trees to provide shade. Most residents are Muslims, who regard courtyards as private spaces to be screened from outsiders. The adobe bricks are square or cubic rather than rectangular, as is the case in the other villages, though R. W. McColl found no reason for this distinctive custom. (upper right) Dunhuang houses are characterized by walled central courtyards, covered by an open-lattice grape arbor. The cover allows for the free movement of air but provides shade from the especially intense direct summer heat and light. Rather than the flat roofs characteristic of dry lands, houses in Dunhuang have sloped roofs, typical of wetter climates, so that rainfall can run off. The practice is apparently influenced by Dunhuang's relative proximity to the population centers of eastern China, where sloped roofs predominate.

KEY ISSUE 3

Why Is Popular Culture Widely Distributed?

- Diffusion of popular housing, clothing, and food
- Role of television in diffusing popular culture

Popular culture varies more in time than in place. Like folk culture, it may originate in one location, within the context of a particular society and environment. But, in contrast to folk culture, it diffuses rapidly across Earth to locations with a variety of physical conditions. Rapid diffusion depends on a group of people having a sufficiently high level of economic development to acquire the material possessions associated with popular culture.

Diffusion of Popular Housing, Clothing, and Food

Some regional differences in food, clothing, and shelter persist in MDCs, but differences are much less than in the past. Go to any recently built neighborhood on the outskirts of an American city from Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon: the houses look the same, the people wear jeans, and the same chains deliver pizza.

Popular Housing Styles

Housing built in the United States since the 1940s demonstrates how popular customs vary more in time than in place. In contrast with folk housing characteristic of the early 1800s, newer housing in the United States has been built to reflect rapidly changing fashion concerning the most suitable house form.

Houses show the influence of shapes, materials, detailing, and other features of architectural style in vogue at any one

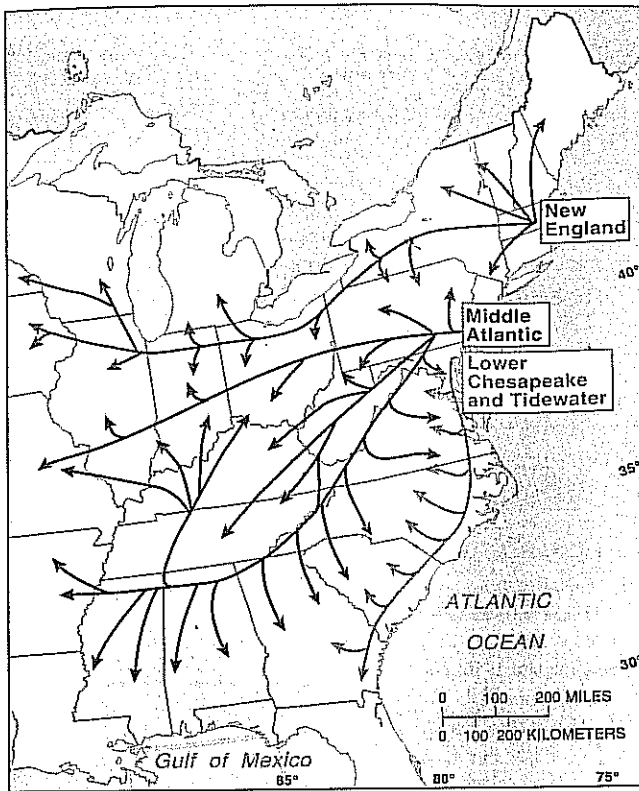


FIGURE 4-9 Source areas of U.S. house types. According to Fred Kniffen, house types in the United States originated in three main source areas and diffused westward along different paths. These paths coincided with predominant routes taken by migrants from the East Coast toward the interior of the country.

point in time. In the years immediately after World War II, which ended in 1945, most U.S. houses were built in a *modern style*. Since the 1960s, styles that architects call *neo-eclectic* have predominated (Figure 4-11).

MODERN HOUSE STYLES (1945-60). Specific types of modern-style houses were popular at different times. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the dominant type was known as *minimal traditional*, reminiscent of Tudor-style houses popular in the 1920s and 1930s. Minimal traditional houses were usually one story, with a dominant front gable and few decorative details. They were small, modest houses designed to house young families and veterans returning from World War II.

The *ranch house* replaced *minimal traditional* as the dominant style of housing in the 1950s and into the 1960s. The ranch house was one story, with the long side parallel to the street. With all the rooms on one level rather than two or three, the ranch house took up a larger lot and encouraged the sprawl of urban areas (see Chapter 13).

The *split-level house* was a popular variant of the ranch house between the 1950s and 1970s. The lower level of the typical split-level house contained the garage and the newly invented "family" room, where the television set was placed. The kitchen and formal living and dining rooms were placed on the intermediate level, with the bedrooms on the top level above the family room and garage.

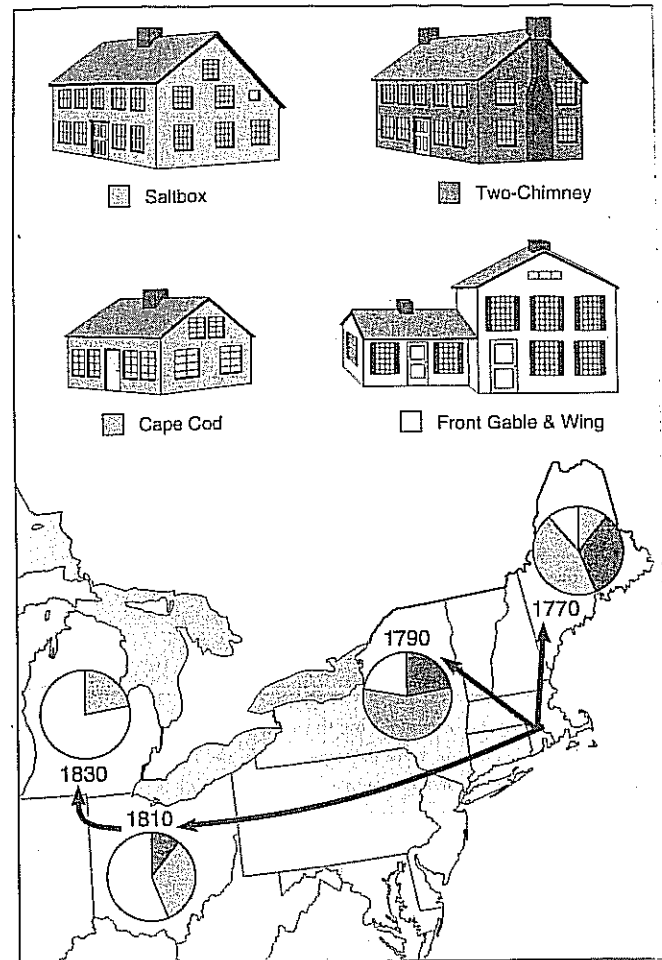


FIGURE 4-10 Diffusion of New England house types. Fred Kniffen suggests these four major house types were popular in New England at various times during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As settlers migrated, they carried memories of familiar house types with them and built similar structures on the frontier. Thus New Englanders were most likely to build houses like the yellow one when they began to migrate to upstate New York in the 1790s because that was the predominant house type they knew. During the 1800s, New Englanders began to migrate farther westward to Ohio and Michigan and built the type of house typical in New England at that time, shown here in yellow.

The *contemporary* style was an especially popular choice between the 1950s and 1970s for architect-designed homes. These houses frequently had flat or low-pitched roofs. The *contemporary* style, popular in the late 1960s, was characterized by low-pitched shed roofs, giving the house the appearance of a series of geometric forms.

NEO-ECLECTIC HOUSE STYLES (SINCE 1960). In the 1960s, *neo-eclectic* styles became popular and by the 1970s surpassed modern styles in vogue. The first popular *neo-eclectic* style was the *mansard* in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The shingle-covered second-story walls sloped slightly inward and merged into the roofline.

The *neo-Tudor* style, popular in the 1970s, was characterized by dominant, steep-pitched front-facing gables and half-timber detailing. The *neo-French* style also appeared in the early 1970s and by the early 1980s was the most fashionable style for

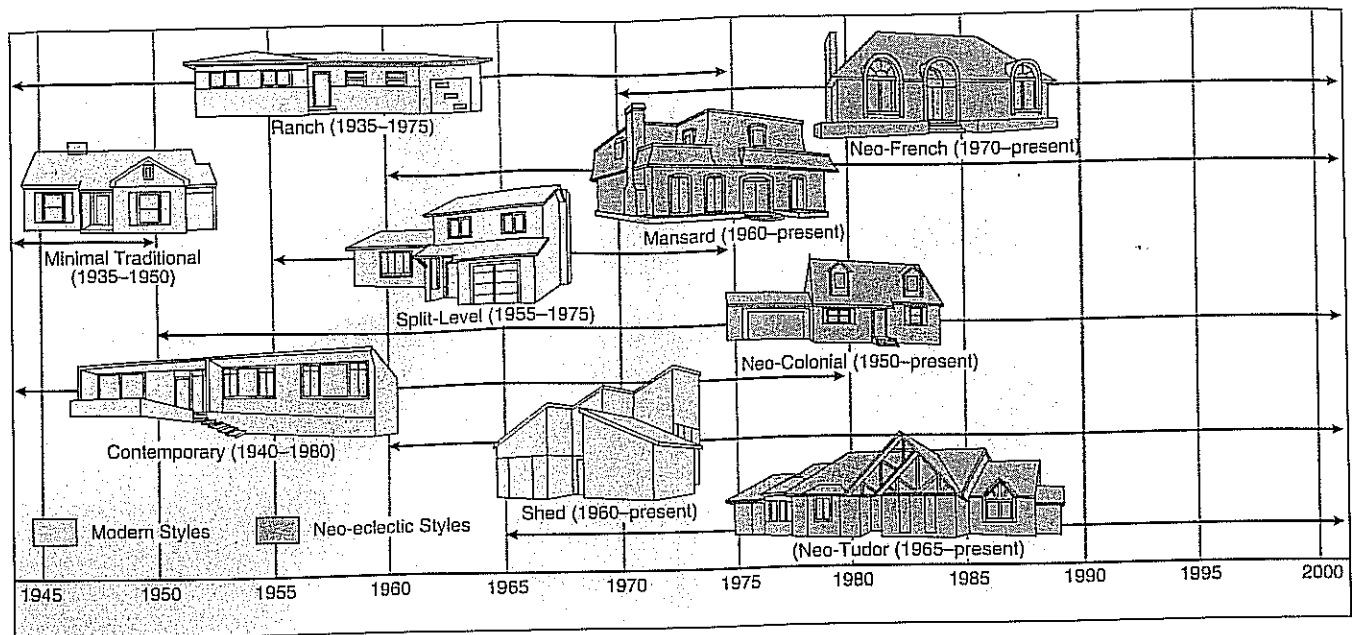


FIGURE 4-11 U.S. house types 1945–90. The dominant type of house construction in the United States was *minimal traditional* during the late 1940s and early 1950s, followed by ranch houses during the late 1950s and 1960s. The split-level was a popular variant of the ranch between the 1950s and 1970s, whereas the *contemporary* style was popular for architect-designed houses during the same period. The *shed* style was widely built in the late 1960s. Neo-eclectic styles, beginning with the *mansard*, were in vogue during the late 1960s. The *neo-Tudor* was popular in the 1970s and the *neo-French* in the 1980s. The *neo-colonial* style has been widely built since the 1950s but never dominated popular architecture.

houses. It featured dormer windows, usually with rounded tops, and high-hipped roofs. The *neo-colonial* style, an adaptation of English colonial houses, has been continuously popular since the 1950s but never dominant. Inside many neo-eclectic houses, a large central “great room” has replaced separate family and living rooms, which were located in different wings or floors of ranch and split-level houses.

Rapid Diffusion of Clothing Styles

Individual clothing habits reveal how popular culture can be distributed across the landscape with little regard for distinctive physical features. Such habits reflect availability of income, as well as social forms such as job characteristics.

In the MDCs of North America and Western Europe, clothing habits generally reflect occupations rather than particular environments. A lawyer or business executive, for example, tends to wear a dark suit, light shirt or blouse, and necktie or scarf, whereas a factory worker wears jeans and a work shirt. A lawyer in California is more likely to dress like a lawyer in New York than like a steelworker in California.

A second influence on clothing in MDCs is higher income. Women’s clothes, in particular, change in fashion from one year to the next. The color, shape, and design of dresses change to imitate pieces created by clothing designers. For social purposes, people with sufficient income may update their wardrobe frequently with the latest fashions.

Improved communications have permitted the rapid diffusion of clothing styles from one region of Earth to another. Original designs for women’s dresses, created in Paris, Milan, London, or New York, are reproduced in large quantities at factories in Asia

and sold for relatively low prices in North American and European chain stores. Speed is essential in manufacturing copies of designer dresses because fashion tastes change quickly.

Until recently, a year could elapse from the time an original dress was displayed to the time that inexpensive reproductions were available in the stores. Now the time lag is less than 6 weeks because of the diffusion of fax machines, computers, and satellites. Sketches, patterns, and specifications are sent instantly from European fashion centers to American corporate headquarters and then on to Asian factories. Buyers from the major retail chains can view the fashions on large, high-definition televisions linked by satellite networks.

The globalization of clothing styles has involved increasing awareness by North Americans and Europeans of the variety of folk costumes around the world. Increased travel and the diffusion of television have exposed people in MDCs to other forms of dress, just as people in other parts of the world have come into contact with Western dress. The poncho from South America, the dashiki of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, and the Aleut parka have been adopted by people elsewhere in the world. The continued use of folk costumes in some parts of the globe may persist not because of distinctive environmental conditions or traditional cultural values but to preserve past memories or to attract tourists.

JEANS. An important symbol of the diffusion of Western popular culture is jeans, which became a prized possession for young people throughout the world. In the late 1960s jeans acquired an image of youthful independence in the United States as young people adopted a style of clothing previously associated with low-status manual laborers and farmers.